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HOGARTH AND LANDSEER.*

II.—HOGARTH AS A PAINTER OF ANIMALS.



HERE can be no doubt that the debt owed by dumb animals to Hogarth exceeded that to any other artist except Landseer. Probably they owe a greater debt to each artist than to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, valuable and honourable as has been its services. The society has acted in the only way possible to it, by prosecuting individual instances of cruelty, and thus holding before the eyes of the brutal the terrors of punishment. The artists, on the other hand, have appealed to all alike, whether young or old, cruel or kindly by nature, by means of pictures, which were in their days multiplied almost innumera- bly, penetrating over the whole of England, and beyond it, from the palace to the cottage, until they formed a valuable and inevitable factor in national, if not European education.

They, however, made their appeals to the public in very different spirits, if indeed Landseer can be said to have made any appeal at all. The moral of his work is unmistakable, but it is in a great measure unconscious on the artist's part. The kindness of his soul, and his love for the beautiful creatures he drew, are so incorporated in his art that they may be said to have been mixed with his colours and to have filled his brush.

He preached because he could not help it; his gospel was of example rather than precept. "See how beautiful, how faithful, how brave, how patient, how tender-hearted are these animals," he said in effect, and his hearers or spectators drew the moral to be kind. But it was not in Hogarth's nature to leave morals to be inferred; he started with them. His preaching was always to a text, and his exposition was always forcible, and generally terrible. Never was it more terrible than in his 'Four Stages of Cruelty,' which are almost exclusively devoted to cruelty to animals. There is no doubt about the lesson to be preached, and a terrible one it is. Do we not all know the dreadful history of Tom Nero, who began as a boy by brutally ill-using dogs, and, graduating in cruelty, at length reached its perfection by murdering the servant girl he had seduced from the ways of both honesty and honour? Can any one forget, who has once seen it, the terrible dissection scene, in which a dog is about to revenge the cruelties committed by Tom Nero on his kind by eating the felon's heart? The details of these engravings are too terrible to be put into words, and too revolting for any one to draw in the present day. Perhaps we have no need for them, but yet did we not hear of a dog being roasted alive only the other day?



Group from Hogarth's 'Cruelty'—Second Stage.

It is a question, nevertheless, whether Hogarth did not, in these and others of his prints, damage the moral effect of his work by unnecessary force, especially in the accumulation of incident. None of the atrocities committed by the boys in the first stage, or the men in the second, were more brutal than what boys and men did then, and, we fear, sometimes do now; but did anybody ever see at one and the same time three boys torturing one dog, a fourth boy tying a bone to the tail of another dog (which licks his hand), fifth and sixth boys burning out the eyes of a fowl, seventh boy holding a cock while eighth boy throws at it, ninth boy with another cock ready to be tortured, tenth boy hanging up two cats by their tails, while boys eleven to eighteen are looking on with delight, and boys nineteen and

twenty have just thrown a kitten with bladders tied to it from the top of a house? The impossibility of such a variety of horrible cruelties happening at the same time and place is so great that the edge of our indignation is blunted by our incredulity.

Had Landseer been as uncompromising a judge of his fellow-men as Hogarth was, he had the power to rival Hogarth in depicting the sufferings endured by harmless animals at the hand of man: witness the 'Woburn Game List,' with its terrible headings of wounded game; his 'Otter' writhing on the spear; his 'Random Shot:' but he was too much of a sportsman, too much a man of the world, too much of a sympathizer with the faults and follies of human nature, and perhaps too much of an artist for such subjects to have an attraction for him. A certain amount of cruelty is inseparable from sport, from childhood and

unthinking youth, and a large amount of cruelty is inseparable from nature; and he felt and painted all as only a deeply sensitive and humane spirit could. Although he never, like Hogarth, entered into a campaign against cruelty, it is only in the sports

of youth that he ever seems to tolerate even the smallest amount of it—only then when mixed with the fun and frolic of thoughtless spirits. As I have elsewhere remarked, in his numerous early pictures of cat hunts he always places pussy in a safe



After Landseer's Etching of 'The Sweep.'

position. In one of his early drawings he represents a boy riding a tethered donkey, and thrashing it with a stick;* in another (of which he made a beautiful etching) we see a poor broken-down

hack limping along under the weight of three youths; but the cruelty in each of these cases is of so mitigated a form that even Hogarth could look at them without an attack of virtuous indig-



Group from Hogarth's 'Gin Lane.'

nation. He would not have drawn them, however, as they would not have been serious enough instances of cruelty to enforce a

moral. When he did draw an overladen animal, as in the second Stage of Cruelty, he did it with a vengeance.

This series of the Stages of Cruelty is unique amongst Hogarth's work for the prominence given to animals, and this prominence

* See *Art Journal* for April, 1875.

is given to them only because necessary to enforce the human sermon he was preaching. But though Hogarth seldom, if ever, like Landseer, painted animals for their own sakes, he was the first of English painters—if not of all painters—to show their artistic value in enhancing the moral effect of a painted drama.

He introduces them freely throughout all his work, and always draws them with spirit and correct knowledge of their characters and habits. So much may even be said of his dogs and other animals in his illustrations to "Hudibras," especially to Sidrophel's cat in Plate VIII. It is true that they are not very



From 'The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner,' by Landseer.

well drawn, but this criticism will also apply to the human figures in this early work. Far better are the two dogs in the first plate of the 'Marriage à la Mode,' which are excellently drawn, and which show, though leashed together, an utter want of sympathy one with the other, which argues ill for the future of

the marriage in high life, the contract for which is about to be signed. As good as these, if not better, are the two dogs in the marriage scene of the 'Rake's Progress' (Plate V.), where Rakewell's pug is paying his addresses to the female one-eyed spaniel of his leering one-eyed old bride—thus paro-



*Monkey after Hogarth,
from 'Taste in High Life.'*

*Monkey after Landseer,
from 'The Travelled Monkey.'*

dying the ill-assorted union that is taking place. And nothing could be devised with greater skill to enhance the horror of the gambling scene (Plate VI.) than the dog which is howling with terror at the distracted face of the ruined profligate. The fat lap-dog in Hogarth's well-known print of

'Evening,' toiling along, like its mistress, under a weight of "too solid flesh," may well be compared with Landseer's etching of the 'Ladies' Pets.' In all these cases, and in many more—such as the first plate of the 'Harlot's Progress,' in which the poverty of the country parson is shown by the avidity with

which his horse is eating the straw packed in between a stack of earthen pans; the first of the 'Rake's Progress,' in which the more than half-starved cat is one of the most telling indications of the miserliness of his father; the breakfast scene in the 'Marriage-à la Mode,' where the infidelity of the newly married husband is told by the instinct of the spaniel, which snuffs at the strange cap and ribbons in his pocket; the dogs stealing food in the death scene of the same series, and the 'Distressed Poet'—we see Hogarth's full appreciation of the pictorial value of the relations between animals and men.

It may be said that, however different in disposition artists may be, they cannot help seeing the same things, and, if they be humorists also, without being struck with the same resemblances; and that Landseer may have studied Hogarth and imitated him. But, allowing for these arguments, there is a fundamental fellowship—what may be called a family likeness—between their choices of subject, their manner of composition, their very tricks of incident, which is all the more remarkable because it does not extend to their personal character or the spirit of their work. Although many artists between Hogarth and Landseer studied men and animals and their social affinities, and could not help perceiving the striking likenesses between men and the lower order of animals, we look in vain in Wilkie, or Morland, or Leslie, or Frith, or Cruikshank, for any sign

that either of them thought such facts worthy of pictorial illustration. Both Hogarth and Landseer did, though of course, as usual, in very different spirits. The effect of such observations on the variously sensitive mind of Landseer was fertile in many directions, but, generally speaking, it may be said to have been twofold: on the one hand, the likeness of men to animals disclosed a source of humour at the expense of man, capable of endless amusement of a pleasant kind; on the other, the likeness of animals to men disclosed a source of sentiment of an altogether sweet and ennobling kind—that of the unity of creation, by which the lower animals claimed from man affectionate recognition as fellow-creatures. On Hogarth the effect was simple; it enabled him to show more completely the degradation of man, not only by likeness to what was brutal, but by contrast with what was noble in animal nature. The moral as well as the physical resemblances between man and brute were caught and utilised by both artists: the one mainly for the exaltation of the brute, the other mainly for the depreciation of man. Take, for instance, one picture of Landseer's which nearly approaches the Hogarthian spirit in its absence of elevated sentiment, the 'Travelled Monkey,' and we shall find that in spite of its burlesque of humanity, the feeling it induces is rather amusement at the exaggerated cleverness of the monkey than contempt for the conceit and follies of man. Compare this with any



Group from Hogarth's 'Gin Lane.'

of Hogarth's monkeys, the monkey in the 'South Sea Bubble,' or the monkey in the 'Taste in High Life,' or the 'Dilettante' watering the dead stumps of the Arts, and the laugh raised by them at the expense of human folly will be found very different in quality—hard and bitter, without any cheerful ring of good-humour.

In the same way Hogarth treated the purely physical likeness which exists between the skate and the face of an old woman (see his plate of the 'Gate of Calais'), not to show how comical a likeness it is, but what a hideous creature is an old hag. Both the works of Hogarth and Landseer would, on examination, yield many remarkable illustrations of the Darwinian theory: Landseer's, by showing the effects of breed in the elevation of the type; Hogarth's, by showing the reversion to the lower type under conditions of neglect. It is not too much to say that the feelings raised at the sight of some of Landseer's noblest dogs, such as 'The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner' and 'Suspense,' are little less intense and noble than if the figures were human—the brute is raised almost to the level of humanity, and the same may be said of some of his pictures of deer; but with Hogarth the converse is invariably the case. Two more illustrations of this will properly close this paper: one in which Hogarth has used his utmost art to show how despicable man is by his likeness to the brute, the other to preach the same sermon by contrast. They both occur in the same plate, viz. 'Gin Lane.'

The first group is a most extraordinary instance of the reduction of the human to the brute in the whole of Hogarth's work, and contains a dog and a man gnawing the same bone, their features distorted by hunger and brutality to the same degraded level. How strangely Landseerian is the power of this group, but how strangely un-Landseerian the spirit! On the right of the same terrible print is the other group, which is specially suited to our purpose by affording a comparison with a well-known work by Landseer, his noblest picture of simple pathos, 'The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner.' This group might be called 'The Drunkard's Sole Mourner.' On the steps lies the body, reduced by emaciation almost to a skeleton, of a man who has drunk himself to death; his bony hand still clasps the glass, which has been fashioned by Hogarth into a ghastly image of an hour-glass, as if to show that his time has been measured by gin. He lies surrounded but disregarded by his fellow-creatures, his dog alone with patient and sad face watching by his side—not only the only mourner, but the only rational being in the scene (if we except the pawnbroker). Here at least the two artists, so different in their aims, have each after his own fashion presented with all their force that most noble quality of dogs—the love that lives beyond death. But still the result in Landseer's case is the elevation of the brute; in Hogarth, the degradation of man.

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